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Volunteering with the Forest Service

Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Why Volunteer?

Volunteers are the heartbeat of the Forest Service. Stewardship of the national forests is everyone's responsibility. The national forests and grasslands are there for you to enjoy because many people have served over numerous years to preserve, protect, and improve them. Now you can give something back by volunteering. Your services are much needed, because the Forest Service, like other Government agencies, has a limited budget.

But volunteering isn't just beneficial for the forests, it benefits you. Simply put, it's fun! It can give you the opportunity to pursue a special interest, such as birdwatching or hiking. It has the potential to enrich and improve your life. Spending time in the outdoors, enjoying the company of your fellow volunteers and visitors, can give you a new perspective on other facets of your life. You'll find that being immersed in the beauty of the national forests and experiencing the environment is a special way to relax.

What Can You Do?

The types of work a volunteer can perform are many and varied; the only tasks a volunteer cannot carry out are those associated with law enforcement. Your talents and skills are matched with your work preference to obtain a role that satisfies you and best fulfills the mission of the Forest Service. You may work on a part-time or full-time basis. You can participate in a one-time project or serve over several months, a season, or year-round. The commitment you make is up to you. Training may be provided to you if your job requires it.

If you are retired or have summers free, you may wish to live on a national forest while you work as a volunteer. College students may perform volunteer services related to their coursework for college credit. A variety of jobs are available if you prefer the office environment. There are also numerous opportunities to perform rigorous but satisfying physical labor outdoors.

Some typical volunteer activities include:

- Maintaining and hosting campgrounds
- Answering phones, greeting visitors, and answering mail at Forest Service visitor centers and ranger stations
- Working with computers in Forest Service administrative offices
- Taking photographs
- Planting trees and seeding damaged areas
- Presenting environmental education programs
- Building and repairing fences, nesting boxes, picnic tables, and other structures
- Building barrier-free campsites, docks, and trails
- Restoring damaged stream banks and burnt-over areas.

Who May Volunteer?

Anyone who wants to become involved may apply! Both individuals and groups of a variety of ages, lifestyles, and professions can contribute to the mission of the Forest Service. Typical volunteers include retirees, professionals, international visitors, college students, teenagers, and children. Those under the age of 18 must have the written consent of their parents or guardians. Volunteers must be in good enough health to allow them to perform their duties without risk to themselves or others. A medical exam, paid for by the Federal Government, may be required for some jobs. Persons with disabilities are encouraged to volunteer.

The Forest Service encourages diversity in the volunteer work force just as it does for its paid employees. This diversity enhances the work experience and brings the Forest Service's message back to communities and people who may benefit from its mission.

Organizations that have worked in partnership with the Forest Service include youth groups, civic organizations, environmental groups, user groups, educational institutions, fraternities and sororities, special interest clubs, major corporations, and small businesses.

What is the Forest Service?

Volunteer service in the Forest Service was formalized when the Volunteers in the National Forests Act of 1972 was enacted, authorizing the Forest Service to legally accept volunteers' services as individuals or groups. Volunteers are not considered Federal employees except for the purpose of tort claims and work-related injuries. They receive no compensation, but, if funds are available, incidental expenses — such as transportation, lodging, subsistence, and uniforms — may be reimbursed on a case-by-case basis.

You are only limited by your willingness to serve; however, your effort must also benefit the Forest Service. Where you volunteer is worked out between you and the volunteer coordinator. Because housing is often unavailable, volunteers usually work close to home; but check ahead because housing may be available.

Volunteers are the heartbeat of the Forest Service. The number of volunteers in the national forests always exceeds the number of paid employees, and the work

they contribute is regularly valued in millions of dollars. Volunteers have been part of the Forest Service since its beginnings. Wives of many early rangers did their husbands' office work, ran fire radios, maintained supplies, and hosted visitors, many of whom stayed for supper! In the early days, local citizens reported and helped fight wildland fires. Volunteering soon became a Forest Service tradition.

Volunteering Works

Being a volunteer works! Through your partnership with the Forest Service you can improve your well-being and quality of life, as well as make a permanent mark on your community and the environment by helping to accomplish the Forest Service's mission, "caring for the land and serving people."

The stories of volunteers include individuals who have spent 5, 10, and 20 years devoted to a variety of projects — such as supervising youth groups or managing and administering trails, wildlife, and timber stand improvement projects as a personal caretaker on a specific piece of land. There are also those who have worked at a variety of locations over a number of years, hosting campgrounds, building and maintaining structures, and refurbishing recreation sites.

Volunteer groups have success stories, too. Environmental and civic groups and resource-related businesses spend many hours constructing and restoring campgrounds and picnic areas, constructing and maintaining trails and fostering dialogue between the Forest Service and the public by disseminating information on Forest Service programs and opportunities.

How Do You Apply?

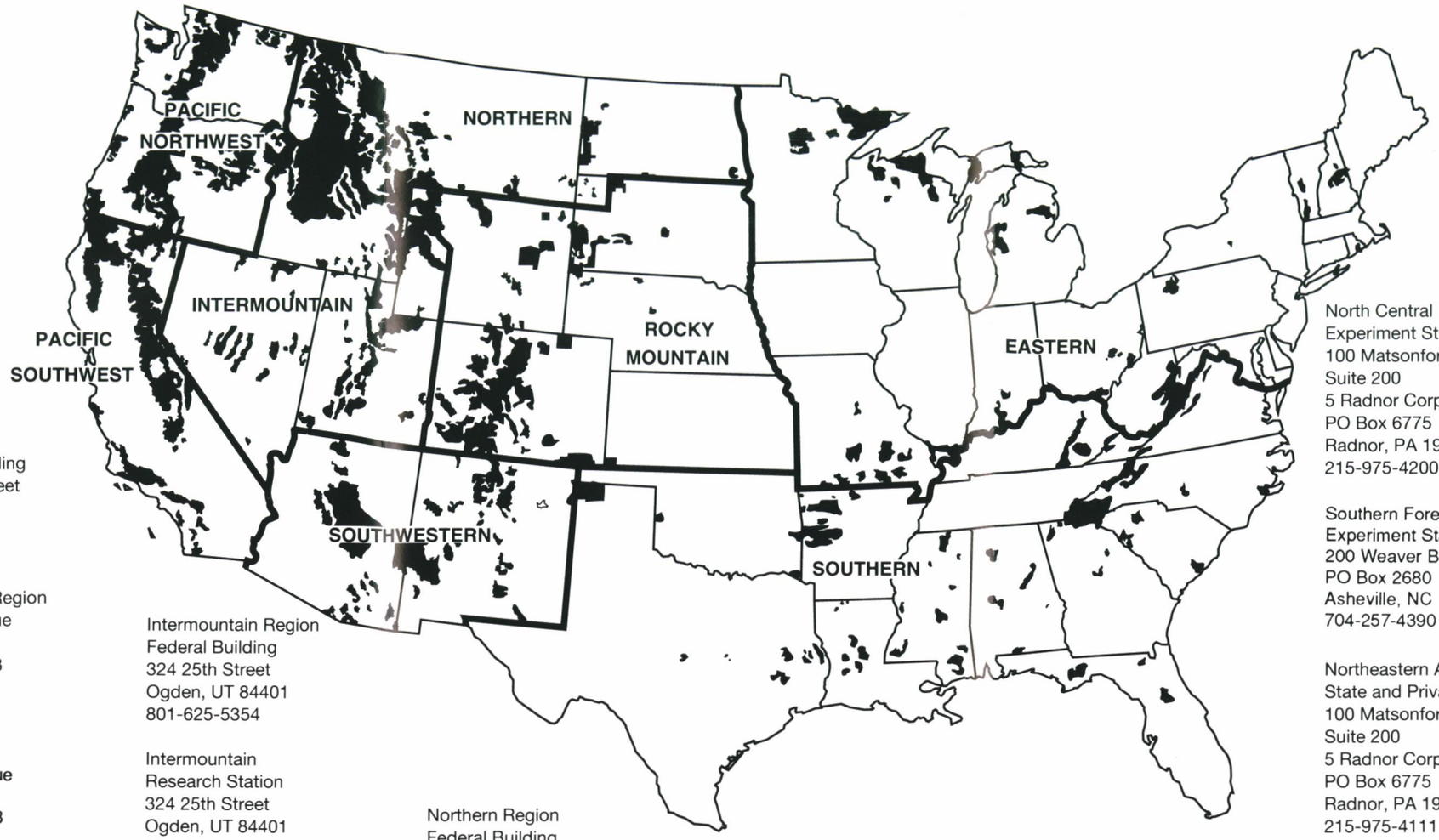
- Write or call the volunteer coordinator where you want to be a volunteer. Request a Volunteer Application (Optional Form 301). Contact the regional or experiment station office to obtain the addresses and telephone numbers of specific sites.
- Complete the application and return it to the volunteer coordinator. Be specific in discussing your skills, experience, and education. Include a letter if you want additional information or have questions.

- The volunteer coordinator will contact you, usually by mail, to inform you whether your talents and skills fit the needs of the place where you have applied.
- If you are selected as a volunteer, you will sign an agreement detailing the conditions of your working arrangement.

The Forest Service

The Forest Service, with your help, manages and protects the National Forest System. The people in the agency ensure that the national forests are there for your recreational use and that the natural resources are adequately preserved and used responsibly. In addition, the Forest Service cooperates with private forest and woodland owners, State and local government agencies, and private organizations to manage and utilize non-Federal forest lands. The Forest Service, also performs valuable research for improving the quality of the forest and forest products.

In 1991, the Forest Service marked the centennial of the National Forest System—in 1891, the forest reserves were transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture. In 1905, the USDA Bureau of Forestry became the Forest Service. The agency manages the National Forest System, which includes 155 national forests, 20 national grasslands, and 8 land utilization projects with a total of 191.6 million acres of land in 44 States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.



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Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station
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Eastern Region
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Forest Products Laboratory
One Gifford Pinchot Drive
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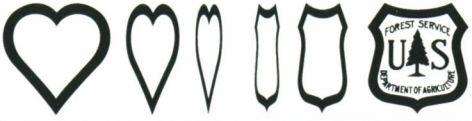
Apply Now! You Can Make a Difference!



Human Resource Programs

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This publication supersedes FS-538, "The Heartbeat of the Forest Service: Volunteering in the National Forests".

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